

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

Energy Management System

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This application is a continuation-in-part of and claims the benefit of U.S. Patent
5 Application Serial No. 09/798,144, filed on March 2, 2001, which claims the benefit of
international application no. PCT/AU99/00740 filed on September 3, 1999 and Australian
application no. AU PP. 5650 filed on September 3, 1998, each of which are hereby
incorporated by reference in their entirety.

The present invention relates to an energy management system, in particular an
10 automotive regenerative propulsion system for generating and accumulating propulsion
energy by retardation of movement. The system has particular application to heavy land
haulage vehicles, such as prime movers, and it will be convenient to describe the
invention in relation to that particular application. However, it is to be understood that
the invention has wider application such as to other types of automotive vehicles, such as
15 light trucks, buses and cars.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Regenerative propulsion systems are known and have been applied to trucks and
buses in the past. Such systems harness energy by retarding the vehicle under braking
20 conditions and accumulating that energy for later use to propel the vehicle. The known
systems have however lacked flexibility in their operation, as they principally have been
arranged to dump accumulated energy all at once, for example when a vehicle is
accelerating from a standing start, while those systems that have allowed for more
controlled release of stored energy, have not done so to optimum efficiency. The use of
25 the energy in the known systems is therefore somewhat inefficient and the known systems
therefore have not met with widespread use. Additionally, known systems are time
consuming and labor intensive to install.

It is an object of the present invention to provide an improved regenerative
propulsion system. It is a further object of the invention to provide a system that can be
30 controlled to generate and release retarding energy more efficiently than known systems.
It is a further object to provide a system that is relatively easy and quick to fit to a vehicle.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the present invention there is provided an energy management system operable in three modes of operation including a driving mode to drive a vehicle drive shaft, a retarding mode to retard said vehicle drive shaft and a neutral mode to have
5 no driving or retarding influence on said vehicle drive shaft, said system comprising an energy accumulator operable to store and release energy through receipt and release of fluid, a pump having a pump drive shaft and being in fluid communication with said energy accumulator, a reservoir of fluid in communication with said pump, and a coupler
10 adapted to couple said pump to said vehicle drive shaft, whereby in said retarding mode, said vehicle drive shaft drives said pump to pump fluid to said energy accumulator, and whereby in said driving mode, said energy accumulator releases fluid to drive said pump which drives said vehicle drive shaft, and whereby in said neutral mode, said pump is inoperative to exert any driving or retarding influence on said vehicle drive shaft, the
15 system further including at least one sensor adapted to provide input signals indicative of selected system parameters including vehicle ground speed, and a controller incorporating a microprocessor adapted to regulate the modes of operation of said pump and said accumulator in response to said input signals.

As defined above, the system is applicable to, or forms a replacement of, the drive
20 shaft of a vehicle. However, it is envisaged that the system could also be applied to a shaft that is not directly or indirectly driven, by the engine of a vehicle, but instead, the shaft may be the axle of a trailer and as such, the term "drive shaft" is therefore to be understood as embracing other such shafts to which the invention could be applied.

The drive shaft, or other shaft to which the system is applied, can operate
25 independently of the system when appropriate by choosing the neutral mode of the system, however, rotation of the shaft can be assisted by system propulsion or retardation when appropriate. Thus, the system can exert greater control over the accumulation or dissipation of energy, by accumulating or releasing that energy when it is most desirable to do so, and not simply when it is possible to do so, such as in ten prior art.

30 The system is coupled to the relevant shaft in any suitable manner, and in one arrangement, that coupling is made intermediate two sections of the shaft. For such an arrangement, the drive shaft may be provided in part, by two sections which are spaced apart to define opposed shaft ends and the system is provided between and connected to

those two sections. For connection, the system may include a main shaft that is connectable to the opposed shaft ends by suitable means such as yoke connectors which are commonly employed between the drive shaft and the differential and gearbox described above, or it may include a full length drive shaft so that the system may be fitted to an existing vehicle simply by removing the existing drive shaft and replacing that with the drive shafts of the system, However other arrangements may also be employed

In either arrangement described above, the drive shaft of the system can be driven or retarded so that the driving or retarding force applied thereto is transferred to the vehicle drive line and consequently the vehicle is driven or retarded accordingly. That drive or retard force is provided as an assistance to any drive and retarding systems which already form part of the vehicle, namely engine drive and braking systems and mechanical braking systems. Thus, the drive or retard force applied by the system may only be a portion of the overall drive or retard force applied to the vehicle.

It is however possible for the system to apply the full drive or retard force, if the force required is within the available limits of the system. For example, the retard force available to be provided by the system may be sufficient to provide the sole retarding force to the vehicle, particularly in such situations when the vehicle is being retarded only slightly to maintain a constant speed on a downhill decline. In the reverse, it is not envisaged that the vehicle will be driven solely by the propulsion energy stored by the system, but that could occur if necessary.

In a first form of the invention, the coupling means of the energy management system includes an auto sequential gearbox that can drive the drive shaft of the system or which can be driven by the drive shaft depending on the mode in which the system is operating. This gearbox or "drop box" preferably includes at least a pair of gears mounted on a second shaft that mesh with gears fitted to the main shaft. The pairs of meshed gears provide different ratios of drive and a selector facility is provided for manual or automatic selection of gear engagement depending on the ratio of drive or retardation required. The selector facility is preferably controlled electro-pneumatically, such as by a selector shaft controlled by a solenoid operated pneumatic actuator which moves laterally to the rotational plane of the gears and which includes means selectively engageable with one of the two pairs of meshed gears for transmitting drive. That engagement means may take any suitable form although it preferably includes a clutch mechanism, such as a dog clutch

The auto sequential gearbox is connected to pumping means comprising a pump/motor arrangement that is driven by the second shaft and that operates as a pump in system retard mode and as a motor in system drive mode. The connection between the second shaft and the pumping means can be made by any suitable connection
5 arrangement. The pump arrangement preferably employs a hydrostatic pump with variable displacement, so that the output of the system can be manually or automatically adjusted. For this purpose, the pump is preferably an axial piston pump, which employs a tiltable swash plate that can be manually or automatically manipulated.

In an alternative form of the invention, the energy management system includes a
10 complete drive shaft and connecting means, such as a pair of yokes disposed at either end of the drive shaft for connection of the drive shaft, between the gearbox and the differential of a vehicle. In this form of the invention, when the system is installed, the drive shaft of the system forms the drive shaft of the vehicle. This arrangement therefore differs from the first form of the invention, in which the system employs a main shaft that
15 forms a section of the overall drive shaft. Between the yokes on the drive shaft, one or more pump assemblies are coupled to the shaft by coupling means and are driven by the shaft in the retard mode of the system, or drive the shaft in the drive mode of the system. The pumps are arranged or selected to provide no driving or retarding influence in the neutral mode of the system.

20 The pump or pumps, which are coupled to the drive shaft, may be coupled thereto in any suitable manner and in one form of the invention, the drive shaft is splined for splined connection with rotating parts of the pumps. In this arrangement, the shaft may drive the pumps through the splined connection, or may be driven by that connection.

The or each pump is again, in this form of the invention, preferably of a variable
25 displacement, hydrostatic kind, that employs a tiltable swash plate which can be manually or automatically manipulated. If more than a single one of these pumps is fixed to the drive shaft, the pumps are preferably connected in series along the shaft between the yokes. Open circuit axial piston pumps can readily be employed in this arrangement although the pumps could alternatively comprise radial piston pumps.

30 An assembly of the above kind comprising a plurality of pumps preferably employs internal porting providing communication between adjacent pumps. External porting can be provided at either end of the assembly of pumps for ingress and egress of fluids. In an arrangement that employs two or more pumps, the adoption of internal

porting permits the use of minimal external porting, so as to minimise the number of hydraulic hoses connected to the assembly. In one arrangement, the assembly employs external porting in the form of a single front port and two rear ports, the front port communicating with an outlet of the fluid reservoir, and the rear ports being in communication respectively with an inlet of the fluid reservoir and the energy accumulation means. Alternatively, the rear port in communication with the inlet of the fluid reservoir can communicate with the inlet of a cooling system, which in turn communicates with the fluid reservoir. In most forms of the energy management system, a cooling system is necessary for cooling the fluid being pumped.

In a preferred form of the invention, fluid pressure to or from the pump arrangement is controlled by balanced logic control elements to maintain separate constant pressure rating between the pump assembly, the fluid reservoir and the accumulation means.

The pump arrangement of the invention is preferably connected by suitable hydraulic lines to the fluid reservoir, the cooling system (if provided) and to the energy accumulation means, which may be in the form of one, or preferably a pair, of accumulators. The connection is preferably made through control means which preferably include a balanced logic controlled manifold that can maintain a constant pressure rating of hydraulic fluid between the pump arrangement and respectively the fluid reservoir and the accumulation means. Additional accumulators can be employed, in particular on a trailer pulled by the prime mover as the energy management system can be applied to the or each trailer pulled. Retardation can be provided by the system, by pumping oil through the control means to the accumulators, or if the accumulators are fully charged or only require partial charge, the oil can be pumped through the control means to the cooling system and then the reservoir with the same retarding effect. In this latter respect, it is not envisaged that the fluid reservoir be pressurised, although that could be achieved if desirable, but instead, the control means can provide resistance to the passage of fluid from the pumping means to the reservoir in the same way that the accumulators provide resistance, and that resistance can be deployed when retardation is required and the accumulators are fully charged.

The, or each, accumulator preferably includes a housing, preferably cylindrical, which is closed at either end in a sealed manner and which includes a movable piston within the housing that separates the housing interior into first and second chambers. The

first chamber carries a charge of compressible gas, while the second chamber is arranged by suitable valve means to receive and release therefrom, a substantially incompressible hydraulic fluid. The accumulators accumulate energy by increasing the amount of oil stored within the second chamber so that the movable piston is caused to move to reduce
5 the volume of the first chamber and so compress the gas stored therewithin. The fluid is pumped into the second chamber by the pump arrangement when the vehicle is under retardation mode, and in this mode, the drive shaft of the system drives the pump arrangement and it is the load required to drive the pump arrangement that creates the retardation force on the drive shaft. Conversely, when oil is released from the second
10 chamber by the force of the compressed gas pushing the movable piston to reduce the volume of the second chamber, the fluid drives the pump arrangement so that it acts as a motor to drive the drive shaft, so assisting propulsion of the vehicle.

The system can be controlled by a microprocessor that is connected by various sensors to various parts of the system. The microprocessor reacts to information received
15 to govern the operation of the system, in particular, to govern the accumulation and release of energy to/from the accumulation means. The microprocessor can be a programmable logic controller of a simple or sophisticated nature. The controller can alternatively be a computer that can be manipulated manually if necessary.

The present invention further extends to a facility for removing load on the engine
20 of a vehicle, at times when the momentum of the vehicle drives the engine. This occurs normally when the vehicle is traveling downhill when the momentum of the vehicle causes the drive shaft to become driven by the wheels of the vehicle through the differential and that drive causes the engine to be driven at a rate greater than idle, even though the engine is not actually propelling the vehicle. This results in the engine
25 consuming fuel at a rate greater than it would under idle and the fuel consumed is wasted, given that there is no propulsive force generated. All that is generated is a load on the engine, which, while it does have a braking effect, also causes consumption of fuel as hereinbefore described and engine wear.

The load removal facility of this aspect of the invention can be provided by a
30 mechanism that disengages the drive shaft from driving the engine, so that the engine can idle under load conditions of the kind described above. This facility can be identified as drive-line separation or DLS. Under the conditions described above and in a vehicle fitted with DLS, the engine consumes fuel at the rate it does under idle, which is the

minimum consumption rate available. Any suitable arrangement can be adopted for this purpose and in one form, the mechanism is disposed along the drive shaft, between the engine and the vehicle gearbox. This mechanism includes a disengagable coupling, so that the drive shaft entering the engine can be disengaged from the drive shaft extending to the gearbox. Any suitable disengagable coupling can be employed, and for example, known clutch arrangements could be employed. However, it is preferable that the disengagable coupling be instantly recouplable, as distinct from gradually recouplable, such as is provided with standard automotive clutches that have a pair of opposed clutch faces that are brought gradually into full engagement.

The preferred mechanism employs a selectively engagable clutch that can slip in one direction of drive shaft rotation and which drivingly engages in the other direction. Such a coupling can be arranged to disconnect the separate sections of the drive shaft, when the engine starts to be driven by the drive shaft and to reconnect when engine drive resumes. For this, the mechanism can employ a ratchet-type coupling.

The above described mechanism can therefore operate so that on a downhill run of sufficient incline, the section of the drive shaft extending from the gearbox slips relative to the portion of the drive shaft extending to the engine, so that the latter drive shaft section is not driven and the engine can idle. When the incline begins to flatten out and the momentum of the vehicle reduces, the engine can resume drive of the drive shaft and the coupling between the two sections of the drive shaft will engage by virtue that the section of the drive shaft extending from the engine tends to rotate faster than the section extending to the gearbox.

Preferably the mechanism can be locked against disengagement and any suitable locking means for that purpose may be adopted. In one arrangement, a pin can be employed to lock the disengagable coupling parts together and that pin is preferably insertable through a pair of alignable bores provided in the respective coupling parts. Alternatively, a keyed arrangement may be employed. The pin, if employed, preferably can be inserted and removed from within one or both bores as required to lock or unlock the coupling. Movement of the locking means from a locked to an unlocked position preferably can be manually or automatically activated and any suitable arrangement for that purpose may be adopted.

The load removing facility as above described can be applied to a vehicle independently of the regenerative propulsion system, however they preferably are applied

together. In such an arrangement, when the drive shaft is separated, the engine provides no braking effect, (like in a known vehicle such as when the gearbox is placed into neutral) and so the vehicle will tend to accelerate down an incline. To arrest that acceleration, it would be normal to apply the vehicle brakes, however, by application to
5 the vehicle of the energy management system, the vehicle can be retarded without necessarily applying the brakes, or at least with less reliance on the brakes. That retardation can facilitate recharging of the accumulators as previously described, or if the accumulators are already fully or partially charged as appropriate, the retarding energy can simply be dissipated by pumping oil through a controller to the cooling system and
10 then on to the reservoir.

The invention also extends to a terrain logging and prediction facility and that facility employs a memory that memorises the terrain of a certain vehicle route. Thus, the facility memorises the contour of a route, so that in advance, it has knowledge of level and inclined sections of the route and can control the energy management system so that
15 energy can be accumulated and released at the most efficient rate. The facility preferably includes one or more inclinometers suitable to record the contour of the route and a memory, preferably in the form of a computer.

The facility can also be used to log a journey and to provide information either to the driver or to a remote station, as to the position or progress of the vehicle. As such, the
20 facility preferably includes information storage means and transmission means for transmitting data.

The attached drawings show example embodiments of the invention of the foregoing kind. The particularity of those drawings and the associated description does not supersede the generality of the preceding broad description of the invention.

25 FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional view of an accumulator for use in the energy management system of the invention.

FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view of an auto sequential transfer gearbox.

FIGS. 3 to 7 show detailed views of the pneumatic actuator shown in FIG. 2.

FIG. 8 is a layout view of an energy management system according to the
30 invention.

FIGS. 9 to 11 show an alternative pumping arrangement for use in the energy management system of the invention.

FIGS. 12a, 12b and 12c show layout views of fluid flow through the energy management system of the invention.

FIG. 13 is an alternative layout view of an energy management system according to the invention.

5 FIG 14 is a cross-sectional view of a further embodiment of the invention, in which the pump drive shaft is connected to the vehicle drive shaft (or a suitable intermediate shaft) via a coupler in the form of an intermediate transfer case incorporating a clutch mechanism disposed coaxially around the pump drive shaft.

10 Referring to the drawings, an accumulator of the kind developed for the present invention is shown in FIG. 1. The accumulator 10 is of elongate cylindrical construction and includes an outer cylindrical housing 11. Within housing 11, a pair of longitudinally spaced end caps 12 and 13 are disposed and each of these end caps includes a body portion 14 and an annular flange 15. The body portion 14 of each end cap 12, 13 has a diameter sufficient to be snugly received within the housing 11 and is provided with a
15 groove 16 that can receive an O-ring seal to seal against the inside surface 17 of the housing 11. Other sealing arrangements may be provided as appropriate.

 The annular flange 15 of each end cap 12, 13 is received within a recessed section 18 of the housing 11 and abuts against the step portion 19 of the recessed section 18. Engagement between the annular flange 15 and the step portion 19 limits movement of
20 the end caps 12, 13 toward each other and sets the volume of the accumulator. The end caps 12, 13 are fixed in position, by a threaded locking ring 20 that threadably engages the inside surface 21 of the recessed section 18. At the end of the threaded section of the locking ring 20 remote from the respective end caps 12, 13, a further recessed section 22 is provided and a further O-ring 23 can be disposed between the locking ring 20 and the
25 inside surface 24 of the recessed section 22. The O-ring 23 is retained in the position shown, by an annular flat key 25, which is of such an outer diameter to fit within a groove 26 machined in the recessed section 22. The flat key 25 is secured to the locking ring 20 by a plurality of threaded fasteners 27. The arrangement described securely seals the interior of the accumulator 10 existing between the end caps 12, 13 against leakage of
30 fluid therefrom.

 The interior 28 of the accumulator 10, is separated into two chambers, one of which is filled with a fixed amount of compressible nitrogen gas, while the other chamber is arranged to receive and discharge hydraulic oil therefrom. Nitrogen gas is the preferred

choice of compressible gas because nitrogen is inert, cost effective and the most suitable gas known for use in accumulators, although a range of other gases could be employed. The hydraulic oil is preferably that marketed under the name CASTROL HYSPIN IWH68, which has good pressure and temperature characteristics, although other oils, such as vegetable oils could be used and it is envisaged that in the future a mixture of high pressure range suitable oil and water could be employed.

In FIG. 1, a central piston 29 is shown and that piston is shown separated along the longitudinal centre-line of the housing 11, into an extreme left-hand and right-hand position. It needs to be appreciated however, that in practice, the piston 29 cannot be separated as shown and will adopt in its entirety a fully left-hand position, a fully right-hand position, or a position therebetween. The position of the piston 29 is dependent on the charge of the accumulator. For illustration purposes, the nitrogen gas is accommodated in the left-hand chamber 30, while the hydraulic oil is accommodated in the right-hand chamber 31.

The piston 29 is cylindrical and is a close fit within the inside surface 17 of the housing 11. The outer surface 32 of the piston 29 is sealed against the inner surface 17 by a pair of seals 33 and 34. The seal 33 is preferably a combination of a TURCON AQ-seal 5 (250 by 12 by 5.75) and Quad ring seal (234.55 by 3.53) and O-ring (227.97 by 5.33), while the seal 34 is an O-ring. A sliding ring 35 is also provided for sealing purposes. Clearly, other sealing arrangements can be employed, which are suitable to prevent leakage of fluid between the chambers 30 and 31.

The piston 29 includes a valve member 36 that is fixed to a central body portion 37 by threaded fasteners 38. The valve member 36 is formed in two parts 39 and 40 that nest together at a flanged joint 41. A spring 42 maintains the parts 39 and 40 in the extended arrangement shown. The valve part 39 includes a frustoconical valve head 43 for sealing engagement within a complementary but reverse shaped frustoconical recess 44 formed in the end cap 13. The valve head 43 includes an annular groove for receiving an O-ring 45 for sealing against the surface of the recess 44.

A conduit 46 extends from the recess 44 and the combination of the recess 44 and the conduit 46 constitutes an inlet/outlet passage to the chamber 31. Movement of the piston 29 within the housing 11 occurs as a result of the accumulator 10 being charged or discharged. When the engine management system is in retardation mode, then the accumulator will be being charged, so that oil will be forced into the chamber 31 through

the conduit 46 and the recess 44, forcing the piston 29 toward the upper A piston position shown and compressing the gas accommodated in the chamber 30. When the system is in discharge mode, the reverse occurs and the compressed gas forces the piston toward the lower B piston position forcing the oil out of the chamber 31 through the recess 44 and the conduit 46. When the accumulator is completely discharged, the valve head 43 sealingly engages in the recess 44, so that further egress of oil out of the chamber 31 is prevented. A small amount of oil is maintained in the chamber 31, for lubrication purposes, ie to lubricate between the inside surface 17 of the housing 11 and the outer surface 32 of the piston 29.

The end cap 12 includes a gas valve assembly 47 that extends into a conduit 48. The gas valve assembly 47 facilitates ingress or egress of gas from within the chamber 30 and generally is used to fill the chamber 30 with gas to the operating pressure and to top-up the gas as leakage occurs over time. The gas valve assembly can also be used as an emergency release to discharge the chamber 30 when necessary. The gas valve assembly comprises a 6000 PSI working pressure valve that has an appropriate safety operation to release pressure in the event of over pressurisation, although various other assemblies could equally be used.

The accumulator 10 operates in the following manner. To charge the accumulator, hydraulic oil is pumped into the chamber 31 under pressure through the conduit 46. As the chamber 31 fills with oil, the piston 29 is driven toward the end cap 12 causing the gas within the chamber 30 to be compressed. It should be appreciated that hydraulic oil is largely incompressible and therefore fluid compression effectively only occurs in the chamber 30. Oil can continue to be pumped into the chamber 31 until maximum compression of the gas in the chamber 30 occurs. That will occur when the piston 29 has reached the upper A piston position illustrated. The maximum gas compression is determined by a variety of factors, such as material strength of the housing 11 and the end cap 12, the capability of the various seals to retain the pressure and local transport standards that govern pressure vessels on road vehicles. A typical maximum gas compression in the chamber 30 is 42 MPA.

At the maximum charged condition of the accumulator 10 when the piston 29 is in the upper A position, and for all positions of the piston 29 between the upper A position and the lower B position, energy can be discharged from the accumulator. Thus, when accumulated energy is required, oil is released from the chamber 31, through the conduit

46 by action of the compressed gas in the chamber 30 driving the piston 29 toward the lower B piston position. The accumulated energy can be completely or partially discharged depending on the energy requirements and equally, the accumulator can later be completely or partially charged, depending on the retarding energy available to pump
5 oil into the chamber 31. That is, it is not necessary for proper working of the accumulator to completely charge and completely discharge. Additionally, it is appropriate for the accumulator to be partially or fully discharged when it is only partially charged, and a plurality of discharges can occur without necessarily requiring recharging.

One form of gearbox developed for the present invention is known as an auto
10 sequential transfer gearbox and for the purposes of the invention, the auto sequential gearbox is mounted to the vehicle drive line between the existing vehicle gearbox and differential, where a rubber shock mounted universal joint would normally be positioned in known prime movers. The auto sequential gearbox does not interfere with the normal function of the vehicle drive line, but provides retardation or propulsion assistance when
15 desired. That is, if the regenerative propulsion system is fitted to a vehicle but is not in use, the vehicle will operate as if the system was not fitted.

The auto sequential gearbox 50 shown in FIG. 2 includes a housing 5, that sealingly accommodates a rotatable main or top shaft 52. Seals 53 are provided for sealing the shaft 52 within the housing 51, while cylindrical roller bearings 54 locate and
20 facilitate rotation of the shaft 52 relative to the housing 11. A circlip 55 locates the roller bearings 54 relative to the housing 51. Attached to each end of the top shaft 52 is a yoke 56 and each yoke is arranged for connection to a similar yoke or other appropriate connector attached to the drive shaft of the vehicle. When the system is not in operation the top shaft 52 will rotate under the influence of the vehicle drive shaft

25 The top shaft 52 includes a pair of spaced-apart coaxial gear wheels 57 and 58 and these are fixed to the shaft in any suitable manner. The gears 57 and 58 are arranged for engagement with a further pair of gear wheels 59 and 60 respectively, disposed on a second or bottom shaft 61. Like the top shaft 52, the bottom shaft is rotatably located relative to the housing 51 by cylindrical roller bearings 62. The arrangement only
30 requires sealing by seals 63 at one end of the bottom shaft 61, as the housing at the other end is closed by a plate 64. The gears 59 and 60 are mounted to the bottom shaft 61 on needle roller bearings 65 to facilitate relative rotation between the respective gears and the bottom shaft, when required. The needle roller bearings 65 are immersed in oil

contained in the gear case sump S for lubrication purposes, while the gears 57 and 58 are lubricated by oil splash.

Disposed between the gears 59 and 60, is a dog clutch 66, that controls transmission between the top shaft 52 and the bottom shaft 61 through the gears 57 to 60.

5 The dog clutch 66 is controlled by a selector rod 67 which is electro-pneumatically operated by solenoid activation of a pneumatic actuator 68 (shown in dot outline) to engage and disengage the dog clutch from either of the gears 59 or 60 and a connecting web 71 extends in connection between the selector rod 67 and the dog clutch 66. The selector rod 67 is located relative to the housing 11 within bushes 72. Movement of the
10 selector rod 67 is through a distance of only several millimetres.

In the arrangement shown, engagement of the gear 59 with the dog clutch results in transmission between the top and bottom shafts 52 and 61 through the gears 57 and 59. Conversely, engagement of the gear 60 with the dog clutch 66 results in transmission between the top and bottom shafts through the gears 58 and 60. Movement of the dog
15 clutch 66 to a neutral position intermediate the gears 59 and 60 results in no transmission between the top and bottom shafts. Whichever of the gears 59 and 60 is not engaged by the dog clutch 66, rotates freely about the bottom shaft or its respective needle roller bearing 65. In the neutral position of the dog clutch, both gears 59 and 60 can rotate freely on the bottom shaft (assuming the top shaft is rotating). It is envisaged that the separate
20 gear ratios between the gears 57 and 59, and 58 and 60 will be 1:1 and 1:2, although those ratios can be altered as necessary to suit the particular application involved. Operation of the dog clutch in as much as engagement with the gears 59 and 60 is concerned, would be well understood by a person skilled in this art.

The dog clutch 66 is slidably fixed to the bottom shaft 61 and prior to engagement
25 of the dog clutch to either of the gears 59 or 60 the shaft 61 is rotated up to a speed equal to that of the gears 59 to 60 to enable smooth engagement of the dog clutch therewith. The pump arrangement drives the bottom shaft 61 under accumulated pressure for that purpose although other means to achieve this could also be employed.

The auto sequential gearbox 50 is connected to a pump, which in turn is connected
30 to the accumulator 10. When oil is being received by the accumulator 10, that oil is being pumped into the accumulator by the pump arrangement that is driven by the bottom shaft 61 of the auto sequential gearbox. For that drive to occur, one of the pairs of gears 57, 59 or 58, 60 is required to be engaged by the dog clutch so that the bottom shaft 61 is driven

by the top shaft 52. This occurs when motion of the vehicle is under retardation and the mechanism of the drive just described which results in oil being pumped into the accumulator, results in a retarding load being placed onto the top shaft 52 and hence a retarding effect applied to the vehicle. That is, to retard the vehicle, the top shaft 52 is
5 connected by either of the gears 57 or 58 to the gears 59 or 60 respectively, so that the top shall drives the bottom shaft 61 which in turn drives a pump arrangement that pumps oil into the accumulator. It is the driving load of the top shaft 52 that generates motion retardation on the vehicle.

If motion retardation is required beyond the point where the accumulator 10 is
10 fully charged with oil, the top shaft 52 continues to drive the bottom shaft 61, and hence the pump arrangement, but the oil is then pumped directly to a reservoir via a balanced logic control element which maintains a constant oil pressure, for example in the region of 42 MPA, prior to release to an oil cooler and then to the reservoir. Thus, even though the accumulator is fully charged, motion retardation can still be provided.

15 When the system is operating to provide a propulsive force, then the accumulator, by virtue of the oil being released therefrom, drives the pump arrangement, which in turn drives the bottom shaft 61 and through the gear connection selected, the top shaft 52 is driven. Drive of the top shaft 52 causes drive of the vehicle drive shaft, providing assistance to propel the vehicle, generally when the vehicle is travelling up an incline or
20 the vehicle is accelerating to traffic speed from a standing start or from low speed.

The pump arrangement can take any suitable form. It is preferred that the arrangement employs a pump which is of the hydrostatic kind and is reversible to act both as a pump and a motor depending on the requirements of the system. Such a pump can employ a charge pump although that is not essential. The pump is also preferably a
25 variable displacement pump and a suitable pump employs a tiltable swash plate that is used to vary the displacement by movement thereof. Such pumps are well known. Reversing the angle of the swash plate results in reversing the flow of oil from the pump, so that the pump can operate as a motor to drive the system. Pumps of the above kind are well known and their attachment to the auto sequential gearbox 50 of FIG. 2 can be made
30 in any suitable manner. The pump arrangement is not shown connected to the gearbox 50 in FIG. 2, but the facility for connection is shown. That facility includes a recess 116 and bolt connectors 117. Moreover, a bore 118 is shown and this bore 118 is provided in the bottom shaft 61 and a splined shaft is connected thereto, although a pump shaft extending

from the pump arrangement could equally be employed. The connected arrangement is shown in FIG. 8 in which the pump/motor 104 is shown connected to the gearbox 110.

The pneumatic actuator 68 shown in dot outline in FIG. 2 is shown in more detail in FIGS. 3 to 7. FIG. 3 shows an external view of the actuator 68, while FIGS. 4 to 7 are schematic cross-sectional views longitudinally of the actuator. Referring to FIG. 3, the actuator 60 includes a front mounting block 73 that is of square barrel construction which is cylindrically bored internally and that has an annular flange 74 for connection to the housing 51. The connection is not shown, but is releasable and can be made in any suitable manner such as by bolting the flange 74 to the housing 51. The mounting block 73 is connected to a square cylindrically internally bored housing 75 that houses a piston arrangement which is shown in FIGS. 4 to 7. The mounting block 73 can be connected to the housing 75 by any suitable manner and may be threadably attached thereto. Standard sealing arrangements may be employed to seal the connection.

The other end of the cylindrical housing 75 is connected to a ported end plate 76, which supports in any suitable manner two solenoid actuated pneumatic valves 77 (only one of the valves 77 can be seen in FIG. 3), that can, be for example five ported, two position, spring returned pneumatic valves. Other valves may also be appropriate. The end plate 76 may also be connected to the housing 75 in any suitable manner like the mounting part 73. The solenoid valves govern the passage of pressurised air to the pneumatic actuator 68 as described hereinafter.

Referring to FIGS. 4 to 7, the pneumatic actuator 65 includes a pair of pistons 80 and 81, each of which includes a respective head 82 and 83 and a respective shaft 84 and 85. The pistons 80 and 81 are axially aligned and the end 86 of the shaft 85 engages against the rear surface 87 of the head 82 in the disposition of the pistons shown in FIGS. 4 and 5. The end 86 is separated from the rear surface 87 in FIG. 6. Each of the pistons is axially movable longitudinally of the housing 75 and that movement is guided by engagement of the peripheral edge of the respective heads 82 and 83 with the inside surface of the housing 75, and by engagement of the respective shafts 84 and 85 within guide bores 88 and 89.

Movement of the pistons 80 and 61 within the housing 75 is governed by airflow into and out of the housing through ports 88 to 91, as follows.

The ported end plate 76 has an inlet port for passage of pressurised air and two exhaust ports to which silencers may be fitted. Air entering through the inlet then enters

the solenoid valves 77 which distribute the air through internal actuator ports in the housing 75 and the end plate 76. The ports 88 to 91 are schematically shown and these ports form part of the internal portion mentioned above.

FIG. 7 schematically shows the solenoid valves 77a and 77b in communication with the ports 88 to 91. This figure also shows the solenoid actuator 78 and the spring return 79.

In the position shown in FIG. 7, only solenoid 77b is energised and as such, the ports 90 and 92 receive pressurised air, while the ports 91 and 93 are exhausted to atmosphere. This figure corresponds with FIG. 4 and in this position the selector rod 67 is positioned so as to engage the dog clutch 66 with the gears 57 and 59 in a 1:1 ratio.

Movement of the pistons 80 and 81 to the position shown in FIG. 5 is by inflow of air through the ports 90 and 93 and by exhaust of air through the ports 91 and 92. In this position neither of the solenoid valves is energised and pressurised air exists behind the head 63 and in front of the head 82. Because the area of the piston 81 on which air pressure through the port 93 acts is greater than the area of the piston 80 upon which air pressure through the port 90 acts (due to the existence of the shaft 84 on the port 90 side of the piston 80) then the shaft 80 is held in the position shown. In this position, the selector rod 67 has been moved so as to disengage the dog clutch from the gears 57 and 59 and to move it to a position intermediate the respective pairs of gears, so that there is no drive between the top shaft 52 and the bottom shaft 61 and this is the neutral position of the management system. In this position the top shaft 52 can rotate independently of the bottom shaft, so that in effect, in neutral, the management system has no influence on the normal drive shaft of the vehicle.

Maintaining the piston 80 in the neutral position of FIG. 5 is achieved by engagement thereof with the piston 81. Movement of the piston 80 to the position shown in FIG. 6 is by inflow of air through the port 9 and by exhaust of air through the port 90. In this position the solenoid 77a is energised while the solenoid 77b is de-energised and the selector rod 67 has been moved so as to engage the dog clutch 66 with the gears 58 and 60 in a 1:2 ratio.

In the position on of FIG. 6, the piston 83 is driven fully to the end of the actuator and there is no necessity to maintain pressure through the port 93. In practice however, pressure has been maintained through the port 93, given that in this state the solenoid is

de-energised, i.e. removal of pressure through the port 93 would require energisation of the solenoid.

The pneumatic actuator 68 advantageously facilitates the disposition of the selector rod 67 in one of three different positions. The three different extensions of the shaft 84 from the housing 75 are shown in FIG. 3 in which the end of the shaft 84 is designated by the reference numeral 92⁴, 92⁵ and 92⁶, corresponding to the extent of the shaft 84 shown in FIGS. 4 to 6 respectively.

The end 94 of the shaft 84 is fixably attachable to the selector rod and a screw threaded attachment is appropriate. Other alternative arrangements may also apply and for example, the selector rod 67 may be biased towards the shaft end 92 by suitable biasing means, so that it moves with the shaft 84 between the positions shown in FIGS. 4 to 6

Control of the pneumatic actuator 67 can be by any suitable electro-pneumatic circuit such as that shown in FIG. 7.

A layout of a system according to the invention is shown in FIG. 8. The layout includes a pair of accumulators 100 and 101, which are connected by high pressure hydraulic fluid lines 102 to a balanced logic controlled manifold 103. The manifold 103 can divert oil received either from the accumulators, or from the pump/motor 104 under controlled conditions, specifically to maintain a constant pressure rating between the pump/motor 104 and the accumulators. For example, an oil cooler 105 is connected to the manifold 103 by high pressure fluid line 106 and that cooler cools oil in a known manner before releasing the oil to a hydraulic reservoir 107. Not all oil may be passed through the cooler 105 and the fluid line 108 shown in dot outline, provides a passage for hydraulic fluid that by-passes the cooler 105. The line 108 can be used to pump excess fluid directly to the reservoir 107, when the accumulators 100/101 are fully charged or when they do not require the full level of fluid being pumped that fluid generally will not require cooling, because heating of the fluid normally occurs in fluid released from the accumulators. The oil cooler 105 can have any suitable form such as is commonly known in the hydraulic industry.

The system shown in FIG. 8 can employ any number of filters suitable to filter the oil as necessary. Conveniently these may be located as necessary at the inlet and outlets of the reservoir, although other filter locations may equally be provided.

The reservoir 107 is connected to the pump/motor 104 and the pump/motor draws on fluid contained in the reservoir for pumping to the accumulator. Likewise, fluid released from the accumulator to drive the pump/motor 104 is returned to reservoir 107 after it passes through the pump/motor 104. Like the oil cooler, oil reservoirs are well
5 known and the reservoir suitable for use with the present invention can be of any known, suitable form.

The system shown in FIG. 8 includes a charge pump 109 and the charge pump operates to ensure that a permanent supply of oil is available to the inlet side of the pump/motor 104. The charge pump 109 is generally required in closed loop hydrostatic
10 pump systems in which the pump is unable to draw oil from the oil reservoir. A charge pump is normally used to top up losses in a system as oil passes through the closed loop on return to the pump. In the system of the invention, the oil does not always loop back through the system, so that the charge pump is required to provide the pump with a constant quantity of available oil at all times. The system can employ an internal charge
15 pump and/or an external charge pump. In the pump arrangement depicted, both an internal (not visible in FIG. 8) and an external charge pump are provided. The external charge pump 109 is provided because the internal charge pump cannot always provide sufficient oil.

The system could operate effectively without a charge pump by the use of an
20 alternative hydrostatic pump. The elimination of the charge pump is preferred, as that reduces the power drain in the system and so system efficiency is increased.

The auto sequential gearbox 110 is as earlier described, although in FIG. 8, it is shown connected to the pump/motor 104 and the pneumatic actuator 111. The FIG. 8 layout also shows the connections to the prime mover differential at 112, and the prime
25 mover gearbox at 113.

The FIG. 8 layout further shows microprocessor 114, which is connected to a variety of sensors and solenoid actuators as previously described via electrical connectors shown in dot-dash form. The microprocessor 114 is also connected electrically to the balanced logic controlled manifold 103 and to the command module 115 that sits within
30 the driver's cabin. An example controller layout is shown in FIG. 9.

An alternative pumping arrangement is shown in FIGS. 9 to 11, and in that arrangement, the transfer case and the auto sequential gearbox of FIG. 2, along with the actuating arrangement shown in FIGS. 3 to 7, are not required. The arrangement 120

shown in FIGS. 9 to 11 is highly advantageous in that that it employs a single through shaft 121, to which yokes 122, 123 are attached at opposite ends thereof. In this arrangement, the existing drive shaft of a vehicle can be removed, and replaced directly with the arrangement 120, as the through shaft 121 and the yokes 122, 123 are arranged to have the same elongate extent as a normal drive shaft arrangement.

The arrangement of FIG. 9 is an expanded view of part of the assembled arrangement shown in FIG. 11, while FIG. 10 is a cross-sectional view of the arrangement of FIG. 9. Referring to FIG. 9, the yoke 122 is secured to a threaded end of the through shaft by a nut 124. The through shaft 121 includes splined sections 125 and 126, for cooperating with splined openings in component parts that are secured to the shaft. The shaft 121 extends through a plurality of parts comprising a front manifold 127, a pump housing 128, a pump assembly 129 having a rotatable swash plate 130, a plurality of pistons 131 and a cylinder casing 132. A stationary valve plate 133 seats between the cylinder casing 132 and a rear manifold 134, comprising manifold parts 135, 136 fixed to the end of the housing 128. A sleeve or bush 137 is attached to the shaft 121 in splined engagement therewith and the sleeve extends through the manifold parts 135 and 136 and rotates with the shaft 121. A roller bearing 13B is provided between the sleeve 137 and the manifold 134. The arrangement 120 further includes bolts 139 provided for securing the parts thereof together.

A cross-sectional assembled view of the arrangement shown in FIG. 9 is shown in FIG. 10, in which the same reference numerals are used to denote the same parts.

The pump assembly 129 operates in a known manner such that angular displacement or tilting of the swash plate 130 results in fluid being pumped through the assembly. Angular displacement of the swash plate 130 occurs about the axis of pins 140 which locate the swash plate, while that displacement is initiated by changing the balance in the pilot pressure, preferably by an electrical signal received from a controller of the energy management system. The pilot pressure acts in a known manner in pump assembly 129 on the swash plate cradle cylinders and the change in balance is such as to move and hold the swash plate in the desired position. Because the type of pump illustrated in FIGS. 9 to 11 is of a known kind, only brief details of its operation will be provided. The pistons 131 are fixed at the end thereof disposed outside the cylinder casing 132, in a slip joint 141 that engages the inside face of the swash plate, such that the pistons 131 can rotate relative to the swash plate about the axis of the shaft 121. When

the inside face of the swash plate 130 is disposed in a plane perpendicular to the axis of the shaft 121, the pistons 131 and the cylinder casing 132 rotate without relative reciprocating movement. However, when the swash plate is rotated about the axis of the pins 137, reciprocating movement does occur and fluid is pumped by that movement.

5 Fluid enters each cylinder on the suction stroke of the pistons through cylinder ports 142 and is pumped out of each cylinder through the same ports on the compression stroke of the pistons. The swash plate 130 can be rotated in either direction about the axis of the pins 137. The direction of rotation of the swash plate 130 controls whether the system drives or retards the drive shaft, or whether no drive or retardation occurs in one direction
10 of rotation, fluid will be pumped by the pump assembly 129 to retard the through shaft 121, while the direction of rotation will allow the pump assembly to act as a motor to drive the through shaft 121. The amount of rotation determines the amount of retarding or driving force exerted by the pump assembly 129. When the swash plate 130 is not rotated, the pump 129 displaces no hydraulic fluid and so no retarding or drive occurs. A
15 suitable form of swash plate pump is manufactured by Sauer Sundstrand and is known as a Series 45 axial piston open circuit pump. Such a pump is appropriate for both forms of the invention described herein.

The arrangement 120 includes internal porting which advantageously facilitates reduction the number of parts constituting the arrangement and facilities a compact
20 construction. The internal porting replaces the normal external porting of each pump, so that, as seen in FIGS. 9 and 10, the only external ports are those of ports 143 and 144 which are disposed at either end of the arrangement 120, for ingress and egress of fluid. Flow of fluid through the ports 143, 144 can be in either direction, depending on whether the energy management system is in drive or retard mode. No flow occurs when the
25 system is in neutral mode.

The arrangement 120 preferably is fully flooded for operation. That is, the level of fluid within the housing 128 is preferably filled to submerge the entire cylinder casing 132, so that during operation of the pump 129, fluid is available for receipt within each of the cylinders of the casing.

30 The ports 144 represent connections between the accumulators and the reservoir respectively, while the port 143 represents a connection from the accumulators. In this arrangement, the internal porting conveniently facilitates the provision of only three external ports, so that only three hydraulic hoses are required to be connected to the

arrangement 10. FIGS. 12a 12b and 12c show the flow of fluid from the ports 143 and 144 during three different operations of the energy management system that employs the pumping arrangement of FIGS. 9 to 11. The components of FIG. 12a are marked. The same components are included in FIGS. 12b and 12c. As shown, only three hoses are
5 attached to the arrangement 120.

FIG. 10 illustrates the use of an adjustable yoke arrangement applied at the connection between the yoke 123 and the shaft section 126. The yoke 23 includes an integral sleeve 145 which is splined and which can be fitted to the shaft section 126 to provide for minor adjustment in drive shaft length. Thus, the one arrangement 120 can
10 replace a range of existing vehicle drive shafts which vary in length, by adjusting the relative position between the yoke 123 and the shaft section 126.

FIG. 11 illustrates a further arrangement 150, which is a modified form of the arrangement 120. The modification resides in the number of pump assemblies positioned on the through shaft and in the arrangement 150, four pump assemblies are shown. These
15 pump assemblies 151 to 154 are connected together along the through shaft, which extends between the yokes 155 and 156. Each of the pump assemblies 151 to 154 includes a balanced logic element 157 and a solenoid actuator 158 to control the function of that element. The balanced logic element 157 controls the pilot pressure to the swashplate 130 and is itself controlled by the solenoid actuator 158.

The assemblies 120, 150 function in the energy management system to retard or drive the vehicle to which they are applied in the same manner as described in relation to the earlier figures. The number of pump assemblies employed in the arrangement is optional, although with the type of pumps described above, four such assemblies is considered to be appropriate by way of size restrictions, ie available space to mount the
20 pump assemblies between drive shaft yokes, and by way of energy capacity. However, radially larger pump assemblies could be employed if less than four pump assemblies is necessary, or if greater energy capacity is required.

When the arrangement shown in FIGS. 9 to 11 is fitted to a vehicle, appropriate torque arm attachments are required to ensure that the various stationary parts of the
30 arrangement do not spin when the shaft 121 rotates. This is within the knowledge of a person skilled in the art.

FIG. 13 shows layout of an energy management system according to the invention. The layout drawing is similar to that of FIG. 8 and differs principally by the inclusion of

the pumping arrangement 150 of FIG. 11. Thus, it can be seen that the energy management system is operable with either of the pumping arrangements shown in FIGS. 8 or 13.

Figure 14 shows a further embodiment of the system in which, unless otherwise indicated, similar features are denoted by corresponding reference numerals. In this case, an axial piston pump 200 incorporates a pump drive shaft 202, which is connected to a section of the vehicle drive shaft 204 via a coupler in the form of an intermediate transfer case 206. The transfer case incorporates a drive transmission mechanism in the form of gear train 208 for transmission of drive between the respective shafts. The effective transmission ratio of the transfer case is designed to provide optimum pumping efficiency over a predetermined drive cycle corresponding to the intended vehicular application.

The gear train 208 incorporates a first drive gear 210 connected to the vehicle drive shaft 204 (or a suitable intermediate shaft) and a second drive gear 212 connected to the pump drive shaft 202. The first and second drive gears are supported for meshing engagement within the pump transfer case 206. In the embodiment shown, the pump is mounted directly to the pump transfer case. Alternatively, however, the pump may be connected indirectly to the pump transfer case via an intermediate shaft, universal coupling, or other form of drive transmission mechanism or linkage.

It should also be appreciated that the pump may be connected, either directly, or indirectly via a pump transfer case, to part of the primary transmission system of the vehicle remote from the vehicle drive shaft itself. For example, in trucks and larger scale commercial vehicles, there is commonly incorporated a gearbox transfer case to transmit drive from an output shaft of the gearbox to the main vehicle drive shaft or driveline, typically via a torque proportioning differential mechanism. Conveniently, in such cases, the pump of the energy management system may be connected to an idler shaft within the gearbox transfer case, either directly or via a separate pump transfer case.

The flexible use of these transfer cases in these ways enables the pump and associated hardware to be axially spaced apart from, and optionally non-parallel to, other shafts in the drive transmission system. It thereby enables the hardware to be flexibly and optimally positioned in the limited space available within different vehicles, while also providing enhanced flexibility in terms of transmission ratios and decoupling mechanisms. This is particularly advantageous in many retro-fitting applications, because of the need to fit the system hardware around existing componentry. In this context, any

reference to connection of the pump drive shaft to the vehicle drive shaft should be broadly understood to encompass direct connection, as well as indirect connection via intermediate gears or other transmission elements, or via intermediate gearbox, idler, differential, power take-off or output shafts.

5 In the embodiment of figure 14, the drive transmission mechanism includes a clutch 214 disposed coaxially around one end of the pump drive shaft, within the pump transfer case. This clutch is engageable to transmit drive between the vehicle drive shaft 204 and the pump drive shaft 202 in the drive and retardation modes, and is disengageable to permit independent rotation of the vehicle drive shaft and the pump
10 drive shaft in the neutral mode.

 More specifically, the clutch includes a clutch pack comprising a plurality of first clutch members in the form of first annular clutch plates 216 non-rotatably connected to the pump drive shaft 202, and a plurality of second clutch members in the form of second
15 annular clutch plates 218 non-rotatably connected to a torque tube 220. The first and second clutch plates are mutually interleaved for progressive frictional engagement. The torque tube 220 is rotatably supported around an end section of the pump drive shaft, while the pump drive gear 212 is non-rotatably connected to the torque tube 220.

 In this way, engagement of the clutch drivingly connects the pump drive shaft to the pump drive gear, via the torque tube to which the pump drive gear is keyed, thereby to
20 enable selective transmission of drive between the vehicle drive shaft and the pump. The clutch plates are resiliently urged into frictional engagement by clutch springs 222, and selectively disengaged by any suitable form of actuator (not shown), including mechanical, hydraulic, pneumatic or electromagnetic actuators.

 In one embodiment, as a safety measure, the clutch is adapted to slip if a
25 predetermined torque threshold is exceeded. The controller may also be configured to effect complete disengagement of the clutch if a predetermined torque threshold is exceeded, or if a predetermined degree of clutch slippage is detected by appropriately configured sensors.

 It should be appreciated that the clutch need not be coaxial with the pump drive
30 shaft, but may alternatively be incorporated into another part of the transmission mechanism, either within or outside the pump transfer case. The clutch may also be integrated coaxially within the pump unit itself.

An epicyclic gear train (not shown) may optionally also be disposed coaxially around the pump drive shaft to provide the possibility of selection between different transmission ratios, as well as an alternative or additional clutching or decoupling mechanism.

5 The energy management system can include a variety of safety checks and features to ensure safe running of the system at all times. A first safety feature can be provided to ensure that the accumulator cannot be accessed, either by mistake or for maintenance purposes, while the accumulator is in a pressure accumulated state, ie in a state in which the accumulator is storing accumulated energy for propulsive purposes.

10 The likelihood of someone accessing the accumulator is only a real possibility when the vehicle is stationary and therefore, this safety feature employs a reader that reads rotation of the vehicle drive shaft. If the reader, which can be of any suitable kind, reads a zero RPM of the drive shaft for a period of 5 seconds, then a strobe which is mounted at the emergency discharge end of the accumulator is activated, and if the strobe is cut by any

15 movement, such as would occur if a person attempted to work on the accumulator, then a signal is sent to the microprocessor to immediately discharge the accumulated energy. That discharge occurs by direct release of the oil held in the right-hand chamber 31 of the accumulator 10 into the oil reservoir. The alternative is to release the nitrogen gas from the left-hand chamber 30, but that gas could be under very high pressure so as to be

20 dangerous to release in the vicinity of anyone in the immediate area and additionally, unless the gas was released to a reservoir, it would then have to be replaced.

When the drive shaft reader reads an RPM above zero, then the strobe is turned off and thus the above described safety feature is disabled.

When the system is switched on to provide vehicle propulsion, the microprocessor

25 commences receipt of information from various sources, preferably including but not limited to a body roll inclinometer, an incline/decline inclinometer, a road speed indicator and an available pressure indicator which reads available pressure from the accumulator gas chamber. Under certain circumstances, the microprocessor, can also determine the amount of propulsion required as will be described hereinafter in terms of a memory

30 system. The information can be obtained from these sources by any suitable means. Advantageously, the system can be arranged to provide a terrain logging and prediction facility, so that over several runs along the same route, information can be obtained about that route so that the system can efficiently provide retardation and propulsion for the

vehicle over the entire extent of the route. Preferably, the facility will enable forward calculation of the energy required over sections of a route being travelled and will cause the accumulators to be charged at the most efficient rate for the particular route to accommodate the energy required. This facility will reduce the manual interaction required of the driver in driving the vehicle, so that the driver is not diverted from his or her normal driving duties and human error in operating the system is substantially eliminated.

The terrain logging and prediction facility includes one or more, and preferably a pair of inclinometers or equivalent devices or arrangements, that measure chassis roll transverse to the length of the vehicle as well as negative or positive incline relative to that length. The facility includes a memory facility, most preferably a computer, that receives data from the inclinometers and stores that data for later recovery. The stored data can then be used when the vehicle returns to the same route to alert the microprocessor to the contour of that route ahead of the vehicle travelling over any part of the route. The facility can, by virtue of this memory, cause the system to change and discharge the accumulator at maximum efficiency. This is particularly pertinent to accumulator discharge, as the facility will alert the system to parts of the route that for example, require slow discharge of energy over a long period and to other parts of the route that require a higher discharge over a shorter period. The facility will also enable the accumulator to fully discharge over an incline at a constant rate, because the stored data will provide both the length and height of the incline, so that the system can discharge the accumulator at the most efficient rate. The facility can also be arranged to measure the weight of the vehicle load, from pressure transducers in the suspension. That information further assists the facility to discharged tie accumulator at the most efficient rate.

The memory of the facility can enable it to provide a position indicator for the vehicle, so that at any point along the route, the vehicle driver, or a locating station remote from the driver receiving a signal from the vehicle can accurately locate the position of the vehicle on the route. Thus, the driver is not required to keep track of his or her progress along the route, such as by visual identification of signage along the side of a road. The ability of the facility to operate in this manner, is by memorising and constantly monitoring the route conditions. The facility will recognise a pattern in the route and match that pattern to the stored data to determine the position of the vehicle

along the route. The memory of this facility can also be downloaded for transfer to other vehicles fitted with the facility.

5 The facility may include means for the driver to identify the route being taken, so that there is no need to look for a pattern match, although if the vehicle diverges from the selected route, that may result in incorrect functioning of the system. Therefore, it is preferable that the facility continue to match the route pattern the vehicle is travelling with the stored pattern data, so that deviations between the patterns can prompt the facility to look for a different pattern match.

10 The facility preferably continuously stores route data about the particular route being travelled, to constantly refine the memory of that route and to adjust to temporary or permanent deviations therefrom. The stored data can be used to provide relevant information, such as distance to the end of the route and estimated time of arrival. Also, the data can be used for vehicle logs for access by appropriate authorities.

15 The system includes a driver command panel operable by the vehicle driver for the purpose of selecting the operational characteristics of the system required. The command panel preferably includes a vehicle speed selector for selecting vehicle speed, on one hand to govern the speed at which retardation occurs, and on the other hand to govern the speed of the vehicle under propulsion. In retardation mode, if the selected speed for retardation to commence was manually set by the driver at 100 KPH, then the system would apply a retardation force at any time the vehicle exceeded that speed. For practical purposes, the system could employ a set limit past the selected speed, such as 2 KPH before retardation commenced to allow for error in the speed monitoring system.

25 Retardation commences by ramping the swash plate angle of the pump as earlier described. If the speed continues to increase, such as by an amount of a further 1 KPH, the swash plate angle will be further ramped and ramping will continue to be increased until the vehicle is slowed to the selected speed. If the selected speed cannot be obtained, then a warning signal will issue and the driver can apply a braking force, such as by engine or wheel brakes, or by selecting a lower gear. As the vehicle is slowed to the selected speed the controller will reduce the ramp of the swash plate angle so that the vehicle is not retarded to a speed lower than the selected speed. Retardation will be deactivated by the system at any time the driver commences acceleration and the system can sense acceleration by sensing means applied at the turbo boost manifold or at the accelerator potentiometer. Alternatively, retardation will be deactivated if the system

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cannot apply a retarding force and still maintain the vehicle at the selected speed. That is, if the decline down which the vehicle is travelling is not sufficient for the vehicle to maintain its speed as selected under even minor retardation, then the retarding force will be removed.

5 The system can be applied advantageously when the driver changes gear. Under acceleration, any time a gear is changed, propulsion of the vehicle is momentarily interrupted and the vehicle loses speed. This is particularly evident when the vehicle is travelling up an incline, as the vehicle can lose substantial forward momentum. However, in a vehicle fitted with the energy management system of the present invention,
10 accumulated energy can be used to apply a propulsive force during a gear change so that vehicle momentum is maintained. This preferably occurs automatically and the control system, for example, can be arranged to identify when a gear change is taking place, so that the propulsive force can be applied.

 The system preferably includes an alarm or a plurality of alarms that alert the
15 driver when the various parameters manually selected by him or her are exceeded. Such an alarm may sound if the accumulator is fully discharged, or when selected speeds are exceeded. The alarms can be visual or audio or both and preferably can be switched off by the driver. The alarms may be set to reappear or resound after being turned off by the driver if the exceeded parameters remain in that condition, and that may occur for
20 example, after a period of 60 seconds.

 The system can be arranged so that the retardation provided can be as an assistance to the normal braking system or as separate thereto. Where the system can operate to assist the normal braking system, the system includes sensing means suitable to sense depression of the foot brake or hand brake, or to sense other characteristics
25 associated with application of the brake system such as brake air pressure sensed by a suitable transducer, and to apply a retarding force additional to the braking force. The retarding force is preferably variable and is dependent on the pressure applied by the braking system. For example, if the brake air pressure transducer was to read zero KPA, then the system would apply zero ramp angle to the pump swash plate for zero retard
30 torque. If the transducer read 100 KPA, that would result in 50% ramp angle at 50% maximum retard torque, and at a reading of 200 KPA, 100% ramp angle at 100% retard torque.

The present invention provides numerous advantages over systems known in the prior art. The system provides far greater control over the accumulation and dissipation of energy to a vehicle and the controllers provided in the system allow for partial or complete automation of the system, so that driver input to operate the system can be minimised. It is expected that fuel savings in the order of 10% to 20% will be achieved for prime movers operating on long runs. Similar savings can also be expected for shorter runs, although the saving will be more dependant on the manner in which the prime mover is driven. Additionally, the system will serve to increase engine, gearbox, brake and differential life, by the order of 10% to 20%. These advantages far exceed those obtained by prior art systems. The system also has other benefits of an environmental kind, such as reduction in exhaust emissions, brake pad and drum dust emissions and noise emissions (due to less use, or elimination of the engine brake) Further benefits result from reduced maintenance requirements, reduced travel times (due to more constant vehicle speed, particularly uphill) and less driver fatigue.

It is also to be appreciated, that while the benefits of the system are readily apparent for long haulage runs through the country, the system is still highly beneficial for city runs. In the city, the system will run on a 1:2 gear ratio (as described earlier) or other such ratio as considered appropriate, and this ratio is higher than the ratio applied for country runs and therefore, the system will generate greater torque and have greater efficiency on city runs (in the order of twice the levels achieved in a 1:1 country gear ratio compared to a 1:2 city gear ratio). Thus, the system is also very beneficial on city routes. This is particularly applicable for countries or areas that employ large scale rail transport, instead of prime mover or trucking transport.

The invention described herein is susceptible to variations, modifications and/or additions other than those specifically described and it is to be understood that the invention includes all such variations, modifications and/or additions which fall within the spirit and scope of the above description.